

Connecticut General Assembly
Public Health Committee Public Hearing
HB 5326 Testimony from Father Ted Tumicki
March 17, 2014

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am Father Ted Tumicki. I am a moral theologian, canon lawyer, pastor, son, brother, and uncle. I live in Jewett City, and I am speaking against House Bill 5326.

Last June, my mother was dying of a drug-resistant CRE infection in her urinary tract and kidneys. In the hospital, she made the decision to go home under hospice care and told her doctor, who had not yet given a diagnosis. The doctor then walked out of the room to check the latest lab results regarding her kidney function. In a minute the doctor walked back in and said, "There is no improvement with the kidneys or the infection. There is no hope." My mother died on July 20.

I thought of my mother's experience when I read this bill. I noticed that this bill tinkers with the moral, ethical, and linguistic fabric of society and mandates a change. If my mother wanted assistance to end her life, it would have been "assisted suicide" when the doctor walked out of the room but the same act would have been "compassionate aid in dying" when the doctor walked back into the room. So what changed to make the bad, illegal act of assisted suicide into the supposedly good act of compassionate aid in dying? The act is the same; the patient's choice is the same; the patient's condition is the same. This bill seeks to redefine and dictate what is good and bad and what language must be used to describe the same act of assisted suicide. This illustrates what ethicists have described as the human capacity to redefine good and evil to justify one's actions. Is it the role of a public health committee to dictate language use to all citizens and religions? How does this protect and promote public health?

This bill dictates the process and method by which qualified patients must die in order to enjoy legal safety. Is it the role of a public health committee to dictate how a person must die to enjoy the favor of the law? Is it the role of government to hasten the death of its law abiding citizens? Connecticut got out of the death-dictating business when we repealed the death penalty, why do you want to go back into it?

This bill also allows legalized murder. The bill indicates that the qualified patient may "self-administer" the lethal medication and defines "self-administer" as (quote) "a qualified patient's act of ingesting medication." So they have to consume it – they have to eat it or drink it. However, the bill does not say that someone else cannot put the medication in the patient's mouth or mix it with a drink, like orange juice as has been done in Oregon.

When my mother went under Hospice care, she was still competent. Under this proposed bill, she could have requested and received lethal medication to commit suicide, then changed her mind, and someone else could have mixed it with her juice against her will and killed her. Under this bill, someone could have murdered my mother, no one would know, and some people think that this should be legal. Some people think this should be the public health policy of Connecticut. Is it the role of a public health committee to legalize murder? I say, "No." I hope you say the same. Please vote against this bill.

Additional Points

Legalizing assisted suicide destroys a fundamental equality of life and dignity and replaces it with two new categories of people: Those who have a life no longer worth saving or fighting for and

those who do; those who society should help to die and those who society should not help to die. Once society accepts this distinction for assisted suicide, and euthanasia performed under the guise of "assisted suicide," the pressure will mount to end the lives of patients who have lives no longer worth saving or fighting for or even worth the cost of caring for. In 2002 Belgium legalized assisted suicide and euthanasia for competent terminally ill adults; a few weeks ago, the Belgian Parliament expanded the practice to include terminally ill children with the consent of their parents.

Responding to the Belgian law, *America* magazine wrote:

"The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), ruled it unconstitutional to apply the death penalty to anyone under 18. The decision rightly pointed to the European consensus that it was barbaric to execute children. With the passage of the Belgian law, the tables will have been turned. If children are not to be held fully accountable for a capital crime, which might lead to their execution, should they be considered capable of making a decision about when to end their own lives?" (*Current Comment*, in *America*, Vol. 210, No. 8, March 10, 2014, p. 4)

When assisted suicide proponents assert that losing one's autonomy or becoming a burden on family or having no dignity because of the inability to feed oneself constitutes reasons for committing assisted suicide, people with disabilities remind everyone that such reasons describe the disabled; and if society accepts such reasons as valid for causing death by assisted suicide, the message is sent – intended or not, like it or not – that the disabled would be better off dead as well. The message sounds like, "I would be better off dead than like a disabled person. I would be better off dead than be like THEM." Legalizing assisted suicide and thus legitimizing the reasons would send the message that "Yes, you would be better off dead than being like one of THEM." When does the "right to die" become the "duty to die?"

"Assisted suicide" and "compassionate aid in dying" refer to the same process. One reason why the term "compassionate aid in dying" is used instead of "assisted suicide" is because it sounds better.

In 1994, voters in Oregon approved the country's first assisted suicide law in a referendum.

In 1993, prior to the referendum, Derek Humphry, founder of the Hemlock Society*, whose goal was to legalize assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia throughout the country, commissioned a poll by the Roper organization to determine which word or phrase used to describe assisted suicide would get people to vote for an assisted suicide law. The results came in August of 1993. "The euphemisms won," Humphry said. The poll indicated that 44% would vote for a law that read "physician-aided suicide," 51% would vote for "physician's aid in dying," but 65% would vote for "to die with dignity" even though all terms described the same process of assisted suicide. Other proponents also conducted polls. (Cf. Tom Bates, *Write to Die*, *Oregonian*, Dec. 18, 1994.)

The Oregon bill was named the "Death with Dignity Act" and won on election night by 51%-49%.

*The Hemlock Society changed its name in 2003 to End of Life Choices, which subsequently merged in 2005 with Compassion in Dying to form Compassion and Choices. (Cf. Compassion and Choices at www.compassionandchoices.org/who-we-are/timeline, and Derek Humphry, *Farewell to Hemlock: Killed by Its Own Name*, February 21, 2005, at www.assistedsuicide.org/farewell-to-hemlock.html).